

I am writing because I am very concerned about Sinclair Broadcasting's pre-election plans for their 62 television stations. David Shuster had an interesting perspective on the situation today on MSNBC.com: "Imagine if the CBS television network pre-empted '60 Minutes' this Sunday and broadcast Michael Moore's 'Fahrenheit 9/11.' Many [people] might be thrilled. But many [people] would be disgusted and outraged, calling it a deliberate, misleading, and unfair ploy to impact the presidential election at the very end." This exactly describes Sinclair's upcoming stunt.

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry "documentary" days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation. Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Sinclair's hope is to damage Kerry's chances because they know that another four years of George W. Bush in office will make their business even more lucrative than it is now as a result of Bush's stated intent to make it "easier for companies to do business" in America. That's a nice way of saying that they plan to reduce restrictions that are intended to protect labor and the public. In short, that is simply contrary to the public interest.

What's more, this "documentary" is really nothing more than a smear piece, full of factual errors and misleading omissions. One might describe "Fahrenheit 9/11" the same way, but to my knowledge no large media conglomerates are pre-empting regular programming to air "Fahrenheit 9/11" network-wide just days before the presidential election. And Sinclair's plan is to pass this garbage off as journalism: Mark Hyman, a spokesman for Sinclair, says "the documentary is just part of a special news event that we're putting together."

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them.

Thank you.